



# The Hokkaido Wilds Project

The Hokkaido Wilds  
Atsubetsu-ku, Sapporo City  
JAPAN

[The Hokkaido Wilds](#) is a non-profit English-language website that exists to inspire people to explore and enjoy Hokkaido's extraordinary off-the-beaten-track outdoors by ski, bicycle, foot, and canoe in an informed and responsible way. Founded in November 2018 by a Hokkaido resident from New Zealand, we currently have 55 ski touring routes, 42 bicycle touring routes, 42 hiking routes, and 17 canoe routes on the site, with one new route added weekly. We also have detailed information about 28 backcountry huts in Hokkaido available for use by the public. All route documentation, from planning, photography, to written details, is researched and produced by the volunteer HokkaidoWilds.org team.

## [HokkaidoWilds.org](#) Goals

By 2025, our goal is to have written detailed online routes guides for the following in Hokkaido and surrounding areas: 150 ski touring routes, 120 hiking routes, 50 canoe routes, and 120 bikepacking/cycle touring routes. Our aim is for at least half of those routes to be multi-day routes.

## What's special about Hokkaido?

We agree with others that Hokkaido is Japan's adventure capital of Japan. It's Japan's largest and northern-most island, and at about 500km from north to south and east to west, Hokkaido covers an only slightly less than Iceland. Best known for its apocalyptic powder-snow winters, it's also home to vast networks of remote gravel forestry roads, great high-alpine traverse hiking, and pristine waterways. Historically, culturally, geographically and climate-wise, it sits at the southern reaches of the great Okhotsk basin – Kamchatka, Siberia, the Kurils, Sakhalin, Hokkaido. For the prepared traveler, expedition-style travel here is well within the realm of feasibility.

**Indigenous place names:** HokkaidoWilds.org is committed to acknowledging the historical and contemporary indigenous Ainu heritage of Hokkaido. On all new mountain, river, and lake routes posted on the site, Ainu names for the destination are included and feature prominently. We're also working on updating older posts with Ainu place names.

## What does HokkaidoWilds.org provide.

At Hokkaido Wilds we take pride in going beyond just inspiring Instagram photos. We strive to provide the sort of depth of information that makes adventure in Hokkaido truly accessible.

- Location-based search (find routes near you).
- Route guides plus photos.
- GPX and KML route files for GPS navigation.
- Printable GeoPDF topographical maps – can also be used for navigation using smartphone apps.
- Official topo map references.
- Trailhead locations including public transport information.
- Hokkaido mountain hut information (<https://hokkaidowilds.org/huts>).
- Campsite location and details.
- *Onsen* hot springs nearby each trailhead and campsite.
- Safety tips and frequently asked questions, etc.

## HokkaidoWilds.org Audience



HokkaidoWilds.org appears at the top of web search results for phrases such as *Hokkaido backcountry skiing*, *Hokkaido hiking*, *Hokkaido cycle touring*. Monthly unique visitor numbers vary by season, between 8,000 and 11,000 visitors, and is growing. Visitor locations include Japan (25%), United States (25%) and other English-speaking Western countries (20%).

### **HokkaidoWilds.org Offline Appearances**

We're increasingly working alongside local Hokkaido tourism promotion agencies and NPOs to further Hokkaido English-language outdoor adventure promotion and education. In 2019, HokkaidoWilds.org team members have presented keynote addresses and presentations at a number of events inside Japan and overseas. These include the *FOSS4G Hokkaido* conference and Montbell's *Sea to Summit* event, a workshop at the popular *Hokkaido Outdoor Forum*, and snow safety lectures in Singapore. Hokkaido Wilds was also selected as a finalist in the *2019 Geo Contest*, to be hosted by the Japan Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in Tokyo in November 2019.

### **Hokkaido Wilds is a non-profit initiative**

In order to support Hokkaido local groups and organizations achieve the goal of providing sustainable, responsible, and safe access to the Hokkaido outdoors, we are pledging 100% of revenue from the Hokkaido Wilds website to a fund dedicated to financial support for those groups.

### **Hokkaido Wilds is committed to safety in the outdoors**

In order for English-speakers to safely enjoy the Hokkaido outdoors, we've included the following features on the site.

- For all backcountry skiing, hiking, and canoe routes, we provide printable GeoPDF topomaps. Users can download, print, and/or display the maps on a smartphone device. Using Avenza Maps, users can also see their location on the map in real time. We create the maps using official Japan government vector map data.
- GPS route files to be used on GPS-equipped devices.
- Regular educational posts covering issues such as Hokkaido weather, mountain safety, and Japanese mountain etiquette (see <https://hokkaidowilds.org/education>).
- For all river tripping routes, we scrape Japan government official river water level data, including webcams and warnings, and display it on the site in real time.
- Twice a year, we translate and visualize Hokkaido police search and rescue reports, identifying hotspots for SAR events (see <https://hokkaidowilds.org/sar-incidents>).

### **HokkaidoWilds.org Supporters**

We currently cover our web running costs via occasional commissioned route guides to be posted on HokkaidoWilds.org, commissioned by Hokkaido local tourism promotion agencies—these currently make up about 2% of all posts on the site.

- *Guide House Canoa* – Canoa is a canoe guiding operation on Lake Shikotsu in southern Hokkaido. They provided two 16 foot Nova Craft Prospector canoes to us for our canoe route documentation project.
- *MRS Packrafts* - Micro Raft Systems (MRS) is a premium packraft manufacturer based in China's wild and mountainous Sichuan Province. MRS provides us with lightweight durable gear to explore Hokkaido's remote waterways.
- *Day Two NZ* – Based in Rotorua, New Zealand, Day Two provides us with discounted kayaking and canoeing gear.

### **HokkaidoWilds.org Team**



- **Rob Thomson** (New Zealand) - Rob is a New Zealander, and initially founded The Hokkaido Wilds as a space on the web for his Hokkaido adventure stories, originally posted on his personal travel blog 14degrees.org. He still holds the Guinness World Record for the Longest Journey by Skateboard (12,159km). He also previously cycled 12,000km from Japan to Switzerland. He holds a Ph.D. in Behavioral Science, and currently works at Hokusei Gakuen University in Sapporo City as an assistant professor in media and communications (specializing in Internet psychology).
- **Rick Siddle** (UK) - Rick very recently retired back to the UK but has lived and worked in Japan for 20 years, 10 of those in Hokkaido. In that time he hiked, biked and skied over much of the island. He's also an anthropologist who spent his early career working with the Ainu indigenous people of Hokkaido. Even before his adventures in Hokkaido, he had passed more years than he would like to remember tramping the bogs of his native Peak District and the wild hills of Scotland, and trekking in the mountains of Europe and the Himalayas.
- **Haidee Thomson** (New Zealand) - Haidee is a Kiwi, and has lived in Hokkaido for almost 10 years, having lived and worked in Sapporo, Niseko, Muroran, and Chitose City. Keen on the outdoors and birdwatching, Haidee planned most of the multi-day cycle touring routes on The Hokkaido Wilds, including campgrounds, daily distances, and onsen hotspots. Haidee is an assistant professor of applied linguistics at Hokusei University Junior College.
- **Chris Auld** (New Zealand/UK) - Chris is a data scientist with Microsoft Asia, but he's also originally from New Zealand. As a whitewater kayaker, mountain biker and skier with a cabin in Hokkaido he's keen to share both high adventure and family fun trips on Hokkaido Wilds. Chris is a qualified ski guide, avalanche and whitewater rescue technician, outdoor first-aider and he makes a mean backcountry jet-boil wagyu shabu-shabu.
- **Greg and Mari** (Canada and Japan) - Greg and Mari are one of the most prolific Canadian canoeing couples in Hokkaido, with a host of multi-day canoe trips under their belt. Hokkaido Wilds leans heavily on their experience and knowledge when planning canoe trips.
- **Dominika Gan** (Poland) - Domi is an award-winning graphic designer, based in Poland. She's also a passionate outdoors-person. She created the look-and-feel/visual branding of the Hokkaido Wilds, along with custom graphics.

### Contact

Rob Thomson (Founder, The Hokkaido Wilds)

TEL: +81 (0)80-4228-6132 (Japan mobile)

Email: [rob@hokkaidowilds.org](mailto:rob@hokkaidowilds.org)

Instagram: [@rob\\_tomo](https://www.instagram.com/rob_tomo)